/11/ DROGPA NAMGYAL'S YOUTH

BEFORE BIRTH

The Exorcism of the 100,000 Child Demons

Quietly the village of Kalatse lies yonder in the Ladakh high- 361 -
land, deeply imbedded between two enormous mountain ridges of the Western Himalayas. Not far away is the Indus which, still a cascading mountain river here, flows by in a deeply cut-out gorge. The village forms a lovely oasis with luxuriant wheat and barley fields, blooming apricot groves in the midst of towering mountain giants, desolate, projecting rock walls and steep declivities formed by deposits. Quietly the fields and the mountains lie there. The only sounds that strike our ear are the rushing of the nearby mountain river in the gorge and the call of the horse drivers who are transporting on the road along the Indus the trading goods of the Indian merchants. Heavily loaded beasts of burden are carrying these goods to the market of the main town of the area, Leh. There is also the monotonous singing of the women who are watering their field terraces over there. Otherwise everything is still. Through the dormer windows in the roofs of the white-washed houses of the Tibetans the smoke rises up to the blue, cloudless sky. Judging by the position of the sun it is about two o'clock 512
in the afternoon, the time at which the Tibetan goes from the field to his house, when the midday soup is cooked and "drunk" and everybody takes an hour of rest and relaxation.

Only in the Dragshos house (1), the house of Lobsang Wanggyal, 789

1. "Dragshos" is here the name of the house and at the same 552 ●
time the designation of the tribe, the family of the house- 551
owner. Every house in Tibet, and thus also in Ladakh, has its name by which the present owner can likewise be called. Often the name of the house is prefixed to the name of any one of the members of the family so that the frequently recurring personal names such as "Trashi," "Tsering," "Lobsang," and so forth, can be distinguished from each other. In contrast to the limited number of personal names, which usually have a religious significance, the house names display a great multiplicity. There we have a Cloverfield (Ol-t'an-pa), Oilman (sNum-pa), Cook (Soldpon), Stablemaster (C'ibs-dpon),

552 551 Ambassador (P'o-nya), and Castlecaptain (K'ar-dpon), the four latter all being titles from the time of the kingdom; furthermore there are animal names like Fox (Wa-tse-pa), Wolf (Śaṅ-ku-pa); finally there are nicknames such as the Chewing-one (K'a-ldags-pa), Break-leg (rKaṅ-cags-pa), Break-skull (mGo-cags-pa), the Thrown-out-one (P'ar-la-p'an), Thief's-son (rKu p'rug), Cat's-mouth (Bi-la-k'a), Liar (Dzun-can), and other in part insulting names

789 which stands there at the foot of the steep cliff below the old castle ruin on the rocky floor of the valley closely nestled in a group of houses, there is lively activity even now during the hot, muggy afternoon. There is the hollow murmur from the rough throats of men, which occasionally /12/ swells to great strength; in between there can be heard dissonant and deep blasts of trumpets and the beating of drums. Five lamas (Buddhist monks) in red cowls from the nearby monastery Lamayuru are crouched there in the large living room-kitchen of the house with their legs folded under them on rough carpets made of goats' hair. In front of each one of them, on small tables no higher than a footstool and carved with beautiful designs, there are two piles of loose leaves which belong to a book. They are all reading at one and the same time in a loud, grating voice, each one from the leaf which happens to be lying in front of him. When a leaf is finished, it is placed on the pile of leaves that have been read. The leaves made of Tibetan paper were once grey. Now the paper is covered with a blackish layer gleaming with fat, especially in those places where they have come into contact with the lamas' fingers.

With the wild confusion of everybody reading at the same time it is impossible for us to make rhyme or reason of what is being read. Only here and there does our ear catch a few words: "Jis don bum (Tibetan: byis gdon abum)," "The 100,000 child demons!" Then we can make out here and there a few mysterious Sanskrit formulas and syllables, "Om! Hum! Shri!" Magical formulas, powerful exorcising words, partly in Tibetan, and partly in the old sacred Sanskrit language.

It is out of the question that the inhabitants of the house might be listening attentively. How would they ever be able to understand this babel of voices, after all? The evil spirits for whom these phrases of exorcism are designed will undoubtedly make some sense of them and feel their effect, so they think. They themselves go quietly about

to buy some barley from Norbu Wangchug. It is true that he preferred 584
to buy from other farmers because the old Chirpon (34) had a mean

34. Chirpon is a corruption of ĉibs-dpon, in English "horse master" (stable master). It is one of the titles which stem from the time of the kings when the bearers of the title were court officials. The titles have been preserved in the names of the houses. [552]

trick of weighing his goods too short. He always weighed /57/ the [804]
things himself on his old scales with the wooden scale-beam and the balance-scales made of goat's leather. And when he weighed something before you, always two batti (equivalent of four pounds) at a time, it all looked quite correct; but if one later weighed it again at home, it was never right. But for the sake of his nephew the uncle was willing to take this into the bargain for this one time; including the haughty nature that Norbu liked to display. For--in a completely casual manner--Stobsldan was to ask Norbu whether a proposal on the part of Drogpa Namgyal for the hand of Chosskyid would have any prospect of success.

In the evening, as it was getting dark, he came back, with his head and his limbs again heavy from beer and talking. With difficulty and awkwardly he dismounted from his horse, and laboriously he climbed up the bad stone steps to his brother's house. He was received with questioning looks and words, and with comical weightiness and forced sureness he steered towards his seat at the stove in the chansa (living room-kitchen). Again the relatives and the tribe are all gathered together. After Stobsldan has emptied a few bowls of butter tea which the housewife has poured out for him, and after he has smoked a few draughts on the water pipe of the master of the house, he began his report. The parents of Chosskyid, he said, had at first been very cool and had behaved as though they were galons and he a begging beda. Nothing could come of the marriage; there had been so many who had asked this girl in marriage; if she wanted to she could hang a suitor from each of her fingers. And there were among these men of a quite superior rank to the Dragshos, against whom the father did not want to say anything otherwise, since after all he was a good friend of his father's. But this marriage could not possibly be brought about. While the girl's father had been talking, the men present in that house had made extensive fun of Stobsldan. But the latter had not given in; he